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THE COMMERCIAL FISHING INDUSTRY IN THE NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES

1957

The commercial fisheries of the Northwest Territories are centered at Great Slave Lake. The industry had its start in 1945 and its development has been rapid and profitable.

Great Slave, with an area of 11,170 square miles, is the fifth largest lake on the continent and lies 340 miles south of the Arctic Circle. Whitefish and lake trout, caught both in summer and winter, have an annual marketed value of about \$1,500,000.

Responsibility for the development and administration of the commercial fisheries of the Northwest Territories lies with the federal Department of Fisheries. The Department's field administration is carried out through the office of the Chief Supervisor of Fisheries for the Central Area with headquarters at Winnipeg, Manitoba.

No commercial fishing had been carried out at Great Slave Lake prior to 1944, when the Fisheries Research Board of Canada made the first scientific survey. As a result of this survey, the lake was opened to fishermen in 1945. Catch limits and fishing regulations for whitefish and lake trout were established, based on the Board's recommendations. Because of federal jurisdiction in the Northwest Territories, Great Slave Lake provided an outstanding opportunity for a program of fishery management, founded on research and scientifically applied conservation measures. It is the first, if not the only, fishery which has been opened commercially following scientific investigations.

These investigations are being continued by the Research Board, and its findings enable the Department to formulate regulations and set catch limits based on sound biological information. Catch limits for whitefish and trout have been increased from the original two million pounds

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(dressed weight) per annum to the present quota of nine million pounds (round weight), the latter divided seasonally into 5,700,000 pounds during the summer and 3,300,000 during the winter. Pike, pickerel and inconnu are also fished commercially, but are of minor importance.

Construction of the all-weather Mackenzie Highway from Grimshaw, Alberta, to Hay River on Great Slave Lake in the autumn of 1948 has been an important factor in the success of the fishery, since the highway allows quick and economical transportation of fish by truck to the railhead at Grimshaw.

The Department of Fisheries has implemented regulations to ensure that commercial fishermen operate with adequate equipment so that the fish can be kept in prime condition. The Department maintains a system of product inspection at Hay River and at other points on the lake where fish packing houses are located. A senior fishery inspector and a number of guardians are stationed at Hay River. During the summer fishing season two patrol vessels operate on the lake and snowmobiles equipped with radio-telephones, are used for winter patrol duty.

The principal market for Great Slave Lake whitefish and lake trout is in the United States, particularly Chicago and New York. In recent years, ninety-five per cent of the catch has been exported to this market, about fifteen per cent in the form of frozen fillets and the balance as fresh dressed fish.

Total production of whitefish and lake trout and the number of commercial licences issued for fishing on Great Slave Lake are shown in the following two tables:











Table I

Great Slave Lake Fishery

Catch and Percentage of Quota Caught, Whitefish and Lake Trout (in round weight)

Year	<u>Summer Season</u>		<u>Winter Season</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	Catch - (1000 lbs)	Per Cent of quota caught %	Catch (1000lbs)	Per cent of quota caught %	Catch (8000 lbs)	Per cent of quota caught %
1949-50	4,642	93	3,987	100	8,629	96
1950-51	3,947	79	3,690	92	7,637	85
1951-52	4,272	81	2,531	68	6,803	76
1952-53	4,095	77	2,912	79	7,007	78
1953-54	3,423	60	2,029	62	5,452	61
1954-55	4,142	73	2,386	72	6,528	73
1955-56	4,845	85	2,277	69	7,122	79
1956-57	4,436	78	2,165	66	6,601	73

Table 2

Great Slave Lake Fishery  
Commercial Licences Issued

(1950-51 to 1956-57)

Year		Resident	Non Resident	Indian	Total
1950-51	Summer	119	66	20	205
	Winter	176	215	6	397
1951-52	Summer	78	124	14	224
	Winter	126	180	51	349
1952-53	Summer	68	114	27	217
	Winter	140	231	75	438
1953-54	Summer	53	77	24	154
	Winter	108	180	60	348
1954-55	Summer	50	128	28	206
	Winter	98	211	59	368
1955-56	Summer	77	165	39	281
	Winter	105	166	56	327
1956-57	Summer	75	162	37	274
	Winter	115	129	56	300

In addition to the commercial fishery on Great Slave Lake, there are nearby lakes where commercial fishing might be developed but probably not in excess of 500,000 pounds a year. MacDonald, Nonacho















and Thompson have all been fitted for wharfing and also for white

hockey and also have been taken from the lake.

Their names are listed in the list of commercial fishing for export

outside the territories developing in other waters, such as Great Bear

Lake, the Mackenzie River, the Beaufort Sea of the waters of the Arctic

regions. The most that can be expected from these areas is a sufficient

quantity from the various fisheries to meet the needs of an expanding

local population.

The large fishery in Hudson Bay, whose base is Churchill,

Manitoba may eventually prove capable of some expansion, but it will

not achieve the status of a major industry.

Spent fish from Canada and the United States have been

part in the sport fishing activities at Churchill in the past and

of Great Slave Lake. Lake trout weighing over 40 pounds have been taken

by trolling line in the fisheries at Churchill. Arctic grayling, pickerel and

northern pike are also part of the catch of local and non-resident anglers

in the Churchill area.